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IRAN AND THE ARABIAN GULF:
THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE

by

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Preface

I began this project with the intention of discovering some clever operational and tactical means by which to defeat Iran's growing military ability to deny access to the Arabian Gulf. Suspecting that my insights would fall well short of those whose primary duties are to plan for this contingency, my "angle" was to determine whether or not the Gulf Cooperation Council states had the military means to counter the anti-access strategy, thereby avoiding yet another massive U.S. involvement in the region. My research quickly revealed that at the unclassified level, this was, at least for me, not a particularly interesting operational problem. Iran has aircraft, missiles, and submarines; therefore, friendly forces must be able to defeat their aircraft, missiles, and submarines. The real meat of the issue is the geo-strategic context: Does Iran really have any intention of closing the Gulf, and what can we do to de-motivate them in the long run? There are no easy answers to these questions: Iran speaks with more than one official voice, and experts and policy-makers are quick to point to evidence which supports their positions. Nonetheless, my research overwhelmingly indicated that our current regional policies may be making the situation worse, so my new purpose became recommending a different strategic approach, backed by a credible GCC-led deterrent. New developments—from President Khatami's overture for increased dialogue to the recent visit to Iran by American wrestlers—occurred almost continuously, while I struggled to keep pace with this project. Within the page constraints of the project, it was impossible

to include all of the fascinating information my research unearthed, let alone all the “late-breaking news.” Still, nothing would please me more than to have my paper made irrelevant in the near future by a new era of normalized relations between Iran and the U.S., eliminating the biggest threat to the critical Gulf waterway.

In the meantime, I wish to acknowledge those who helped me tackle this complex and unwieldy project. Thanks especially to my faculty research advisor, LCDR Clint Holmes, for “correcting me to course” and helping me focus *early* in the process, while giving me the freedom to explore the more appealing strategic dimension of the problem. Thanks also to the always professional and courteous Air University Library staff. Finally, my special appreciation goes to my gracious and generous hosts in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Allowing me to work amongst the Royal Saudi Air Force for 26 months was not only a life-changing experience, but also provided me the insight and perspective that proved invaluable to my understanding of the Gulf region and how best to protect access to its tremendous wealth.

Abstract

The Arabian Gulf region is of critical importance to the United States and our European and Asian allies. The region contains two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves, and the waterway itself is the key sea line of communication to this resource. As the world's only remaining superpower, the U.S. maintains a close watch on the Gulf and threats to its access. Following Iraq's defeat during DESERT STORM, the U.S. has refocused much of its attention on Iran and its growing military sea-denial capabilities. In light of the importance we place on the waterway, U.S. decision-makers must understand the extent of the Iranian threat to the free flow of commerce through the Gulf, and how best to counter it. Our thesis asserts that given the current geopolitical situation, the Iranian threat to the waterway is overstated; however, Gulf Cooperation Council members can and should take the lead in countering any attempt to deny its free access, and in the long term, the U.S. can join them and our other allies to help reduce Iranian incentives to threaten the Gulf.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Arabian Gulf region is of critical importance to the United States and our European and Asian allies. The region contains two thirds of the world's known oil reserves, and the waterway itself is the key sea line of communication to this resource. As the world's only remaining superpower, the U.S. feels a global mandate to maintain a close watch on the Gulf and threats to its access. Following Iraq's defeat in the Gulf Conflict, the U.S. has refocused much of its attention on Iran and its growing military sea-denial capabilities. In light of the importance we place on the waterway, U.S. civilian and military leadership must understand the extent of the Iranian threat to the free flow of commerce through the Gulf, and how best to counter it. Given the current geopolitical situation, this paper's thesis asserts three points. First, the Iranian threat to the waterway is overstated based on both their intentions and capabilities. Second, should Iran attempt to close the Gulf, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.)—can and should take the lead in countering them. Third, the U.S. can help reduce Iranian incentives to threaten the Gulf in the long term, by joining with the GCC and our other allies in a policy of selective engagement with Iran.

This three-part thesis determines the organization of our analysis. After briefly establishing the historical and continued importance we place on free access to the Gulf region and its resources in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 analyzes the Iranian threat to our access, including both their intentions and military capabilities. Though Iran's resolve to threaten the Gulf may be debatable, the paper outlines a possible Iranian anti-access scenario based on their capabilities. After examining critical elements of the strategic context, Chapter 4 provides a response to the scenario. The consequences of heavy U.S. involvement in the region and growing opposition to U.S. foreign policy dictate a low-profile military role for U.S. forces countering the anti-access strategy. Therefore, the chapter concludes that the GCC member states have both the strategic imperative and military means to lead the effort to open the Gulf. A GCC-led military strategy—with a supporting U.S. role—is outlined to counter the anti-access strategy, including recommendations for threat-specific systems which will decrease GCC dependence on Western intervention in the future. The Gulf remains a strategic vulnerability, so Chapter 5 recommends a regional policy that reduces the threat to the waterway in the long term. Perhaps we can ameliorate at least one problem in a region that has cost us much blood, treasure, and heartache in the past.

Chapter 2

Background

If you want to sum it up in one word, it's jobs.

—James Baker, U.S. Secretary of State
Justification for U.S. military response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait

Understanding the current Iranian challenge to Gulf access requires a brief review of key events shaping our current relationship *vis-à-vis* Iran. Prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Iran was a key U.S. ally in the region. This relationship changed drastically when Iranian revolutionaries overthrew the Shah, stormed our embassy in Tehran, and held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days. Our relations with Iran have been generally hostile ever since.¹

The loss of this important regional ally was exacerbated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. With thousands of Soviet troops now within striking distance of the Gulf, President Carter formalized the importance we placed on the region in what became known as the Carter Doctrine, declaring free transit through the Gulf and access to its resources to be a vital U.S. national interest. He created a rapid deployment force which eventually evolved into U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), a separate unified command, illustrating our willingness to employ force to ensure our Gulf interests.² The USSR and the rest of the world now knew in no uncertain terms that the U.S. was serious about protecting access to the Gulf.

President Reagan reiterated this position and backed it up militarily during the Iran-Iraq war. When Iran began laying mines and otherwise harassing maritime traffic in the Gulf—ultimately damaging a number of vessels with mines and small-boat attacks—the U.S. responded with EARNEST WILL, the operation to re-flag Kuwaiti tankers and provide them with U.S. navy escorts. U.S. forces destroyed hostile Iranian naval vessels and even conducted retaliatory strikes against their oil platforms, all to ensure the free flow of traffic through the Gulf.³

Our lead role in the Gulf War underscored our commitment to unrestricted access to the region. Though our involvement certainly had a moral dimension—“fighting aggression and preserving the sovereignty of nations”—President Bush also acknowledged our economic imperative: “We are also talking about maintaining access to energy resources...Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom and the freedom of friendly countries around the world...”⁴ With the absorption of Kuwait and the immediate threat to Saudi Arabia’s primary oil fields, Iraq was poised to control nearly half of the world’s proven oil reserves. The U.S. and our allies could neither afford to let Iraq control the flow of oil at its source, nor allow Iran to interrupt its passage through the Gulf.⁵

Iran returned to the spotlight following Iraq’s defeat. A significant portion of their defense acquisitions since their war with Iraq appears to be directed at closing off the Gulf. This growing capability in the context of our hostile relationship with the Islamic Republic provides, in part, the rationale for both our current policies toward Iran and our robust military presence in the region. Already, about one fifth of the world’s oil supplies pass through the strategic waterway,⁶ and global demand continues to surge by

about 1.5 million barrels per day as the developing world industrializes.⁷ With sixty-five percent of the known oil reserves, the Gulf "will have to satisfy the world's growing demand for oil."⁸ Thus, it is critical that we analyze Iran's national objectives and military capabilities within the historical and current strategic context, in order to safeguard global interests in the region.

Notes

¹ Jo-Anne Hart, "A Spiral of Hostility: U.S.-Iran Relations since the Revolution," *Middle East Insight*, no. 11 (July-August 1995), 23.

² Col Dennis M. Drew and Dr. Donald M. Snow, *Making Strategy: An Introduction to National Security Processes and Problems* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1988), 31.

³ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf and the West: Strategic Relations and Military Realities* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 318-338.

⁴ *Facts on File Yearbook 1990* (New York: Facts on File, 1991), 846.

⁵ Daniel S. Papp, *Contemporary International Relations* (New York: Macmillan College Publishing Company, 1994), 56.

⁶ James Bruce, "Choking the Strait: Iranian naval firepower and the threat to Gulf shipping," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, no. 8 (September 1996): 413.

⁷ Manouchehr Takin, "Many New Ventures in the Middle East Focus on Old Oil, Gas Fields," *Oil and Gas Journal*, no. 94 (27 May 1996): 31-33.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

Intentions and Capabilities

Iran is a big question mark.

—General Anthony C. Zinni
CINC USCENTCOM, describing the countries in his Area of Responsibility

Weakness doesn't assure achieving the objectives required by a leader.

—Saddam Hussein

Understanding Iranian intentions is no simple matter. Are their military acquisition programs indicative of hegemonic tendencies, or merely a force modernization effort to recover from the devastating losses suffered during the Iran-Iraq War? Do they intend to dominate the Gulf region or merely balance the military purchases by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and counter U.S. military presence in the region? Even the experts cannot agree, and political considerations muddle the situation even further. Still, a basic understanding of their internal politics may lend some insight into Iranian intentions.

Since the revolution, Iran is classified as an Islamic Republic with a popularly elected president and 270-seat legislative body. However, all executive decisions and legislation are subject to the approval of a Council of Guardians led by the Supreme Juriconsult (*Faqih*)—originally, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.¹ The charismatic

Khomeini exercised his popular mandate as the “final arbiter of all disagreements” and therefore served as the linchpin in Iranian policy-making.² Since his death in 1989, Iran has lacked this consensus, and Iran’s strategic direction and decision-making process has become muddled as a result.³

Despite receiving seventy percent of the popular vote, the moderate President Khatami has to tread very carefully to maintain the support of the conservative legislators and religious leaders.⁴ Conversely, Khomeini’s successor, the Ayatollah Khamenei does not share his predecessor’s esteem, as evidenced by the public’s use of the title *rahbar* (leader) instead of *faqih*.⁵ Gulf expert Shahram Chubin calls the result “a cacophony of voices, many not authoritative on policy, while the government lacks the authority or will to impose a uniform policy.”⁶

This “crisis of authority”⁷ results in conflicting signals from Tehran, complicating an assessment of Iran’s intentions. Chubin observes that policy veers “inconsistently between the pragmatic and the ideological, the moderate and the extreme.”⁸ Indeed, Khatami’s historic overture for dialogue between the American and Iranian people⁹ was promptly followed by Khamenei’s condemnation of the West.¹⁰ Institute for National Strategic Studies fellow and former World Bank economist Patrick Clawson compares Iranian politics with our own: Though essentially a two-party system, on any particular issue, “lines may blur, with some radicals taking a more moderate stance on that point and some moderates taking a more radical stance.”¹¹ The output is shaped by the complex interaction of personalities and often represents a compromise solution espoused by no individual faction.¹² However, the trend has been toward moderation, where public debates in the media and legislature “question the very notion of clerical rule.”¹³ The

back-to-back elections of moderate presidents have resulted in the output of a generally less hostile foreign policy, in spite of the sometimes conflicting rhetoric.¹⁴

The key tenet of this foreign policy is the desire to normalize international relations. Iran expert Laurent Lamote asserts that they base their very survival on it, as discussed below. Overtures toward GCC states, China, Russia, European Union states, and others lend credibility to Lamote's claim.¹⁵ In the process, the moderates are apparently distancing themselves from radical fundamentalists and their policies of supporting terrorism and Islamic insurgency, recognizing that this behavior only justifies their continued isolation by the international community.¹⁶ In light of this trend, U.S. containment policy toward Iran—especially in its most severe manifestation, the May 1995 Executive Order establishing a total trade embargo with Iran¹⁷—may be somewhat ironic, since it may empower the more radical elements in Tehran, as shown in Chapter 5. From the Iranian perspective, the containment policy, combined with our extensive military presence in the Gulf and unabated arms supplies to GCC states, represents their greatest national security threat.¹⁸ This perspective is quite understandable in light of Secretary of State Warren Christopher's remarks: "We must isolate Iraq and Iran until there is a change in their governments, a change in their leadership."¹⁹ Naturally, Iran seeks to subvert our attempts to isolate them, and supplant our regional influence with their own.²⁰ "Containment" and improved international relations are, in their view, mutually exclusive. Likewise, a foreign policy of normalization is clearly inconsistent with a threat to Gulf commerce.

One major factor driving the new direction in Iranian foreign policy is the state of their domestic economy: Experts like Clawson claim the pragmatists recognize that trade

revenues and foreign investment are key to the expensive “reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country” begun under President Rafsanjani.²¹ Iran must establish economic ties with other states in order to revive an economy ravaged by war, depressed oil prices, and self-imposed revolutionary isolation. *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment* cites “considerable damage to the [oil] production, refining and distribution systems that had been in operation” before the Iran-Iraq war, cutting output by sixty percent by 1989.²² It has been recovering steadily but will require at least \$20 billion in investment to achieve pre-war production levels;²³ meanwhile, oil revenues—accounting for about ninety percent of Iran’s export earnings²⁴—are predicted to remain low due to stagnant oil prices.²⁵ Iran will require additional capital to diversify their oil-based economy. Though the Europeans and Japanese are likely to continue trade and investment with Iran because of their importance as both a market and supplier, Iran’s own newspapers acknowledge the cancelled contracts that have resulted from Iran’s inability to pay their foreign debt of over \$30 billion.²⁶ With their annual inflation hovering between forty and fifty percent, and per capita income cut by more than half since the revolution,²⁷ the populace is “profoundly pessimistic about their economic situation.”²⁸ The result is an “increasing level of domestic instability that could motivate leaders to pursue a more rash foreign policy.”²⁹ Thus, while the economy has propelled to power those who seek improved international relations, it could also prove their undoing if they cannot revive it.

Pragmatists and hard-liners alike realize that Iran’s struggling economy cannot afford an obstructed Gulf for any appreciable length of time. With the exception of the Caspian Sea terminal, the Gulf is currently Iran’s only outlet for oil exports and therefore critical to their oil-based economy:³⁰ “With respect to a secure, peaceful and

internationally navigable Gulf, no nation-state has more at stake economically than Iran.³¹ Furthermore, any threat to the Gulf would at a minimum elicit global condemnation and probably provoke an American military attack.³² As Dr. Andrew Rathmell, Research Fellow at the Exeter Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, points out, “If anything, Tehran is concerned at possible U.S. military action to disrupt its oil production or supplies....Iran’s numerous offshore oil installations in the Gulf are disturbingly vulnerable to U.S. naval or air strikes.”³³ Iran is still recovering from U.S. naval operations in 1987.³⁴ Clearly, an Iranian attempt to shut off the Gulf—which would subvert both their attempts at normalization and their economy—would represent a strategy of “last-resort” in response to a threat to their own vital national interests.

In this context, much of the Iranian buildup can be interpreted as largely defensive.³⁵ Their preoccupation with an impending U.S. naval strike³⁶ justifies their naval acquisitions: RAND political scientist Thomas MacNaugher says, “Tehran cannot avoid searching for ways to keep U.S. forces at bay in the future.”³⁷ USMC Major Dale Davis, Middle East Area officer concurs: “Iran’s sea-denial program has a clearly defensive aim...It’s primary goal is to deny or delay hostile naval forces access to Gulf waters.”³⁸ Even with recent acquisitions, the Iranian navy remains “hopelessly outmatched by U.S. naval and air strength in the region,” including the recently reconstituted U.S. Fifth Fleet.³⁹ Their objective would be to deter U.S. decision-makers and confound military planners with the threat of a sunk or damaged ship and its attendant American casualties.⁴⁰ Even their aggressive seizure of Gulf islands Abu Musa and Tumb can be explained defensively in light of stated Israeli threats against Iranian nuclear capabilities: Now armed with short-range HAWK surface-to-air missiles, as well

as anti-shipping missiles, these and other islands guard both the Strait of Hormuz and Bushehr, the location of unfinished nuclear reactors.⁴¹ From this perspective, they are analogous to the Golan Heights, which the Israelis are similarly reluctant to give up.

Nor are the Israelis and Americans Iran's only worry. Rathmell calls their geopolitical environment one "which even the most moderate government would find threatening."⁴² Internally, Iran is faced with a multi-ethnic society: Persians make up only about half of the population. Other factions, such as Kurds, Armenians, Azeris and Baluchis, threaten Iran's territorial integrity, and cross-border opposition groups, like the *Mojahedin e-Khalq*, attack oil and military installations.⁴³ Unstable republics of the former Soviet Union border Iran to the north, civil war-torn Afghanistan lies to their east, and Iraq and the GCC face them on the west. In the latter case, Iran's attempts to join the regional security system have been rebuffed in favor of security agreements with Syria and Egypt!⁴⁴ Meanwhile, arms transfers from the West to GCC states continue unabated.

The Iranian military buildup must be analyzed in this context, as well. Estimates of Gulf defense budgets vary significantly, but sources agree: Iranian defense budgets are paltry when compared to those of Saudi Arabia and the GCC as a whole.⁴⁵ For example, Iran's 1995 defense budget stood at a mere \$2.46 billion while Saudi Arabia spent \$13.3 billion and the GCC total exceeded \$30 billion.⁴⁶ The Iranian trend since 1991 has been declining military expenditures, leveling off and fluctuating around \$3 billion since 1994.⁴⁷ McNaugher contends that this "does not make for much of an arms buildup,"⁴⁸ nor can Iran afford to buy all of the weapons on its ambitious shopping list.⁴⁹

Viewed objectively, Iran's "build-up" is quite reasonable in light of the losses they incurred during their war with Iraq, obsolescence of much of their hardware, and the

lessons learned from the Gulf War. Sources agree that Iran's forces were decimated by the eight-year conflict; loss estimates range between 40 and 60 percent of total military personnel and hardware.⁵⁰ Much of what remained was still of pre-revolution vintage: outdated, non-functional or only partially mission capable, and with no logistics support as a result of the U.S. spare parts embargo.⁵¹ They learned firsthand that ideologically trained human waves are no substitute for military technology, and DESERT STORM reinforced the high price of technological inferiority.⁵² Iran is acting on these lessons, but expert sources agree that their force projection capability remains virtually nonexistent.⁵³

Therefore, this paper concludes the following regarding Iran's intentions to threaten the Gulf: In spite of conflicting signals from Tehran, an unprovoked anti-access strategy runs counter to Iranian foreign and domestic policy objectives, and Iranian defense spending and conventional force modernization do not necessarily indicate hostile intent toward Gulf traffic. They have wisely focused their limited means on deficiencies exposed and lessons learned during two regional conflicts, and on denying or delaying foreign naval interference in the Gulf if required.⁵⁴

Whether or not this is an offensive or last-resort defensive strategy, it is important to understand Iran's capabilities with which to carry it out. This paper focuses on those capabilities directly related to denying access to the Gulf: strike aircraft, shore and sea launched anti-shipping missiles, attack submarines, and naval mines. Other forces are only discussed in the context of their ability to support Iran's sea-denial capabilities.

With less than fifty percent of their US-built aircraft serviceable,⁵⁵ the backbone of the Iranian strike aircraft force is the Su-24 *Fencer*. Iran currently operates an estimated 30 to 48 of these aircraft with many basing options in range of the Gulf.⁵⁶ With

its unrefueled combat radius of 1300km (with external tanks) and payload of 3,000kg,⁵⁷ the *Fencer* “offers a significant improvement in Iran’s long-range strike capabilities and for the first time provides Iran with a long-range maritime strike capability.”⁵⁸ Hence, it is currently the most lethal sea-denial tool in the Iranian air force.

From the surface, Iran wields a variety of anti-shipping surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs), including *Silkworm/Seersucker*, C801, SS-N-22 *Sunburn*, and most recently, C802 missiles.⁵⁹ Of these, the latter two are the most lethal—less susceptible to countermeasures and more difficult to knock down.⁶⁰ Both are sea-skimming hypersonic cruise missiles with ranges of about 70nm⁶¹—nearly the entire breadth of the Strait of Hormuz at its narrowest point.⁶² Iran has deployed all varieties along the strait, including four sites on Abu Musa, located midway between Iran and the U.A.E.⁶³ C802s have also been mounted on missile attack craft, such as the ten *Hegus* purchased from China,⁶⁴ so any point in the Gulf is theoretically vulnerable to the more advanced missiles. Of course, even the older systems could wreak havoc on undefended commercial shipping.

Significant attention has been paid to Iran’s acquisition of three Russian *Kilo* submarines, adding a new dimension to their sea-denial capabilities in the Gulf. Originally purchased to counter missile boats on order by Iraq,⁶⁵ the near-silent diesel-electric subs can likewise target friendly naval or commercial shipping vessels. Each *Kilo* can carry up to 18 torpedoes; both wire-guided and wake-homing torpedoes were included in the sale. With only a few major U.S. surface combatants protected by antiwake-homing defenses,⁶⁶ the anxiety generated by these submarines seems justified.

Ironically, sources with expertise in naval combat such as Davis admit that the subs “represent only a limited threat to the Arab Gulf states or U.S. forces.”⁶⁷ The

confined waters of the Gulf, combined with strong currents through the Strait of Hormuz, make it an extremely hazardous place for even experienced submariners.⁶⁸ This environment should, at least in the near term, outweigh the advantages of using the noisy waters of the Gulf to mask the *Kilo*'s acoustic signature.⁶⁹ The shallow Gulf—with each of the two deepwater channels through the strait only two kilometers wide—increases the chance of detection by hostile air and surface forces, and the *Kilo* can at most remain submerged for about a week.⁷⁰ Beyond the Gulf, they would be operating in deeper waters where extensive U.S. antisubmarine warfare capabilities are enhanced. Davis sums up the direct threat posed by Iran's *Kilos*: "Two or three Russian submarines, even if manned by an experienced crew, would have a very short period of survivability when confronted by the United States' advanced antisubmarine warfare forces."⁷¹

He divines a more immediate use for the subs: "In the near-term the most effective use of the submarines would appear to be for the clandestine deployment of mines."⁷² Technologically simple and inexpensive, mines in the Gulf "have created problems out of all proportion to the resources and effort expended."⁷³ The frigate USS *Samuel B. Roberts* was very nearly sunk by an Iranian mine in 1988 while escorting re-flagged Kuwaiti tankers,⁷⁴ though the mine campaign was not without cost to Iran. Caught in the act during the Iran-Iraq war, the mine-laying ship *Iran Ajr* was tracked, boarded, and sunk by U.S. naval forces, causing Iran much embarrassment while increasing U.S. popular support for our actions in the Gulf.⁷⁵ The submerged *Kilos* offer greater survivability as well as the capability to *covertly* deploy 24 to 36 mines per sortie.⁷⁶ Iran's indigenously produced mines are of the unsophisticated moored or floating variety. They are not deployable by submarine, generally easy to detect, and

inappropriate for use in the Strait of Hormuz because of the strong currents.⁷⁷ However, Iran reportedly received as many as 1800 Russian and Yugoslav mines with its first *Kilo*,⁷⁸ and is also seeking to purchase rocket-propelled EM52 mines from China.⁷⁹ Moored up to 100 meters below the surface, these mines can be used in the strait itself where they can be programmed to select a target and shoot towards it at speeds which defy evasive action.⁸⁰ While all mines present even the most sophisticated navies with a costly and time-consuming dilemma, these modern variants further complicate our planning. The Iraqi mine field off the Kuwaiti coast—including the acoustically triggered *Manta* mine that almost cut the cruiser USS *Princeton* in two—played a significant role in our decision to forego an amphibious assault on Kuwait.⁸¹ Undoubtedly, mines would play a major part in any Iranian anti-access scenario.

The U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence describes a partial scenario in their *Worldwide Submarine Challenges* pamphlet (See Appendix B).⁸² Note, even this source calls the scenario defensive, supporting the conclusion that the Iranian anti-access strategy is a response to a perceived threat to their vital national interests. Nonetheless, prudence dictates we prepare for this scenario. Iran's sea-denial systems in various combinations could be used to seriously constrain access to the Gulf. The likely scenario runs as follows: (1) *Kilo* submarines are used covertly to mine Gulf terminals and choke points, such as the Strait of Hormuz. (2) SSMs are used both to protect the Iranian ports and coast and to threaten Gulf shipping. Iranian missile attack craft are deployed on patrols which cover the breadth of the navigable Gulf, especially through choke points. (3) Shore based missile assets and ports are protected by HAWK surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and MiG-29 interceptors, with missile boats protected primarily by the latter,

especially where not covered by the SAM umbrella. The SA-5 site at Bandar Abbas—capable against medium and high altitude aircraft out to 100 nautical miles—supplements the air interceptors. (4) Strike aircraft patrol for adversary maritime assets with protection and extended warning provided by F-14 aircraft. (5) *Kilo* subs patrol the deeper waters at the mouth of the Gulf, ready to torpedo naval craft attempting entry. In this manner, Iranian forces can provide a layered active and passive capability to deny the free flow of maritime traffic through the Gulf.⁸³

It is important to note that Iranian military capabilities on paper may be somewhat different from those in fact. The Iranians are no different than any other foreign military attempting to assimilate the technology and doctrine of another country. Indeed, their situation is complicated by a mix of Western and non-Western hardware, the latter coming from at least three major suppliers (Russia, China, and North Korea).⁸⁴ The combination of language barriers, Islamic educational paradigms, and the technological leaps required on behalf of essentially developing-world troops conspires to delay initial operational capability and limit proficiency.⁸⁵ For example, their Russian trainers reported that although the Iranian *Kilo* crews were learning fast, they were unable to keep the craft submerged for more than a few hours.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the lack of equipment commonality complicates integration and logistics support, and Iran still suffers from severe shortages of technically experienced manpower following the revolutionary purges.⁸⁷ Middle East defense issues expert Ahmed Hashim highlights these and other factors in the calculus of Iran's true capabilities: "It is critical to differentiate between what the country has contracted to buy and what it has actually received; and between what it has received and what it has actually integrated into its order of battle and made

part of operationally ready forces.”⁸⁸ Michael Eisenstadt, a Fellow at the Washington Institute Military Affairs, adds, “Even if Iran could afford to buy most of the weapons on its shopping list, it would be unable to maintain such a large force structure without significant foreign support, or effectively employ this force without significant changes in doctrine, organization, and manpower policies.”⁸⁹ Hence, the Iranian threat to the Gulf may not be so monolithic as it is often portrayed.

Notes

¹ “Iran/Politics,” *Jane’s Sentinel: Geopolitical Library on CD*, CD-ROM, Jane’s Information Group Ltd., 1997.

² Haleh Vaziri, “The Islamic Republic’s Policy in the Persian Gulf: Who’s Containing Whom, How, and Why?” *Middle East Insight*, no. 11 (July-August 1995): 76-77.

³ Ibid. Numerous experts on Iranian politics also acknowledge Iran’s current lack of consolidated decision-making authority. See also Farhad Kazemi, “All Politics Is Local,” and Laurent Lamote, “Iran’s Foreign Policy and Internal Crisis,” *Iran’s Strategic Intentions and Capabilities*, ed. Patrick Clawson (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1994), 5-54.

⁴ “Iran/Politics,” *Jane’s Sentinel*.

⁵ Kazemi, 51.

⁶ Shahram Chubin, “Iran’s Strategic Aims and Constraints,” *Iran’s Strategic Intentions and Capabilities*, ed. Patrick Clawson (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1994), 83.

⁷ Kazemi, 49.

⁸ Chubin, 83.

⁹ President Mohammed Khatami, CNN interview by Christiane Amanpour, 7 January 1998, Cable News Network, Inc., 1998.

¹⁰ Associated Press, “Iran’s spiritual leader rejects talks with U.S.” *Montgomery Advertiser*, Saturday, 17 January 1998, 9A.

¹¹ Patrick Clawson, “Alternative Foreign Policy Views Among the Iranian Policy Elite,” *Iran’s Strategic Intentions and Capabilities*, ed. Patrick Clawson (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1994) 32.

¹² Iranian politics fits our own western policy models: See Graham Allison’s bureaucratic politics model, as described in Barry B. Hughes, *Continuity and Change in World Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 217-218. Similarly, Dr. Andrew Rathmell claims that domestic politics were at least as important as strategic considerations in the Clinton administration’s implementation of the total embargo on Iran in May of 1995. See Rathmell, “Iran’s Liquid Lifeline,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, no. 7 (September 1995): 414.

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¹³ Gary Sick, "A Sensible Policy Toward Iran," *Middle East Insight*, no. 11 (July-August 1995): 21.

¹⁴ Thomas R. Mattair, "Containment or Collision?" *Middle East Insight*, no. 11 (July-August 1995): 26.

¹⁵ Lamote, 18; and expressed by President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in an interview by George A. Nader, *Middle East Insight*, no. 11 (July-August 1995): 14.

¹⁶ Ibid., 23, supported by numerous other expert sources: Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Iran's Emerging Partnership with Russia," *Middle East Insight*, no. 11 (July-August 1995): 85; Jamal S. Al-Suwaidi, "Gulf Security and the Iranian Challenge," *Security Dialogue*, no. 27 (September 1996): 279; Dr. Andrew Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament—How Great a Threat?" *Jane's Intelligence Review*, no. 6 (July 1994): 317; and Mattair, 26. Iran's official position against terrorism and the spread of Islamic insurgency is also expressed in Rafsanjani, 10 and 12; and the Khatami interview.

¹⁷ Sick, 21.

¹⁸ Chubin, 67; and Hart, 24.

¹⁹ Sick, 21. Our official position is that we seek a change in Iranian *behavior*, as expressed by William Perry, "Working with Gulf Allies to Contain Iraq and Iran," *Defense Issues*, no. 10 (1995): 1.

²⁰ Mesbahi, 84; supported by Iran's official position in Rafsanjani, 9 and 13.

²¹ Clawson, 33; and Rafsanjani, 7.

²² "Iran/GDP," *Jane's Sentinel*, and Dr. Andrew Rathmell, "Iran's Liquid Lifeline," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, no. 7 (September 1995): 412

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Clawson, 36-37; and Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 317.

²⁶ Ibid.; and Suwaidi, 287, are among many sources documenting Iran's debt and resulting inability to attract new investment.

²⁷ "Iran/GDP," *Jane's Sentinel*.

²⁸ Clawson, 36.

²⁹ Suwaidi, 287.

³⁰ Mattair, 28; Rathmell, "Iran's Liquid Lifeline," 414; and echoed in virtually every source discussing an Iranian attempt to close the Gulf.

³¹ Suwaidi, 285.

³² Mattair, 28.

³³ Rathmell, "Iran's Liquid Lifeline," 414.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Iranian News Agency report, "Guards commander warns America against possible attack against Iran," British Broadcasting Corporation, 29 June 1997.

³⁷ Thomas L. McNaugher, "Iran's Military Posture," *Middle East Insight*, no. 11 (July-August 1995): 31.

³⁸ Maj Dale R. Davis, "Iran's Strategic Philosophy and Growing Sea-Denial Capabilities," *Marine Corps Gazette*, no. 79 (July 1995): 22.

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³⁹ James Bruce, "Choking the Strait: Iranian naval firepower and the threat to Gulf shipping," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, no. 8 (September 1996): 412.

⁴⁰ McNaugher, 31.

⁴¹ Mattair, 28; Vaziri, 78-79; and Shawn L. Twing, "Is Iran's Military Buildup Purely Defensive or Potentially Destabilizing?" *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, no. 14 (April 1996): 81.

⁴² Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 318.

⁴³ Suwaidi, 280; Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 318.

⁴⁴ Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 318.

⁴⁵ "Gulf States/Regional Overview," *Jane's Sentinel*; Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran's National Strategy: striving for regional parity or supremacy?" no. 27 (April 1994): 37; and McNaugher, 30.

⁴⁶ "Gulf States/Regional Overview," *Jane's Sentinel*. Corroborated by "Gulf Cooperation Council," on-line, Internet, 17 October 1997, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/allied_contrib96/gcc96.html.

⁴⁷ Ehteshami, 37.

⁴⁸ McNaugher, 30.

⁴⁹ Michael Eisenstadt, "Déjà vu All Over Again? An assessment of Iran's Military Buildup," and Ahmed Hashim, "Iran's Military Situation," *Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities*, ed. Patrick Clawson (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1994): 120, 159.

⁵⁰ Twing, 81.

⁵¹ McNaugher, 31; and Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 319-320.

⁵² Vaziri, 78.

⁵³ Eisenstadt, 144; and "Iran/Current Developments and Recent Operations," *Jane's World Armies*, CD-ROM, Jane's Information Group Ltd., 1997

⁵⁴ Davis, 22; and Hashim, 218.

⁵⁵ Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 320.

⁵⁶ Eisenstadt, 128; Twing, 80; and Johan Ingles le Nobel, ed. "The Gulf States," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment 1997*, (Coulsdon, UK: Jane's Information Group Ltd., 1997): 2.12.7. Periscope's UNSI Military Database still places the Su-24s at a training facility outside Tehran, where the first pilots completed training in August 1995. See Periscope's USNI Military Database, United Communications Group, 1998, on-line, Internet, 17 Mar 98, available from <http://spock.au.af.mil/bbs/usni/nations/mideast/iran/airforce/index.htm>

⁵⁷ Paul Jackson, ed., *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*, (Coulsdon, UK: Jane's Information Group Ltd., 1997): 433-434.

⁵⁸ Eisenstadt, 128.

⁵⁹ James C. Bussert, "Modernized Iranian Navy Poses New Gulf Dilemma," *Signal*, no. 51 (October 1996): 37-38. Most sources, including Bussert, consider any remaining Harpoons non-operational.

⁶⁰ Ibid.; and Davis, 21; and Bill Gertz, "Iran's Regional Powerhouse," *Air Force Magazine*, no. 79 (June 1996): 54-55.

⁶¹ Bussert, 38; and Gertz, 54.

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⁶² David Miller, "Submarines in the Gulf," *Military Technology*, no. 17 (June 1993): 42-43.

⁶³ Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 321; and Busser, 38.

⁶⁴ Bussert, 37.

⁶⁵ Davis, 22.

⁶⁶ Bussert, 37.

⁶⁷ Davis, 22; and Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 321.

⁶⁸ Miller, 42.

⁶⁹ Ibid.; Gertz, 55; and Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 321.

⁷⁰ Office of the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, *Antisubmarine Warfare: Meeting the Challenge* (April 1990), 22.

⁷¹ Davis, 22.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Eisenstadt, 140.

⁷⁴ Cordesman, 434.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 390-391.

⁷⁶ Davis, 22; and Eisenstadt, 141-142.

⁷⁷ Eisenstadt, 141.

⁷⁸ Bussert, 38.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 142; and Bruce, 39.

⁸⁰ Bruce, 39.

⁸¹ James Bruce, "Choking the Strait," 413. See also Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The General's War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 345 and 417.

⁸² Office of Naval Intelligence, *Worldwide Submarine Challenges* (February 1997), 30.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ehteshami, 33.

⁸⁵ Speaking from my own experience as a military advisor to Saudi Arabia, technical training in a second language to a developing Islamic state is no simple matter.

⁸⁶ Hashim, 192.

⁸⁷ Eisenstadt, 119.

⁸⁸ Hashim, 159.

⁸⁹ Eisenstadt, 120.

Chapter 4

The Response

It is better that they do it imperfectly, than you do it perfectly for them. It is their war and your time here is limited.

—T. E. Lawrence

Faced with an Iranian challenge to Gulf access, U.S. decision-makers might be tempted to lead the charge to reopen the Gulf with a massive, perhaps even unilateral, military response. This paper asserts that such a response would ultimately subvert our long-term interests in regional stability. Taking cultural, economic, and strategic factors into account, America should play a supporting role to a GCC-led effort to thwart Iran.

The basing of U.S. forces in GCC states, especially Saudi Arabia, is no minor matter. Even when faced with Iraqi armored and mechanized divisions mere miles from their own eastern oil facilities, Saudi Arabia was reluctant to allow U.S. forces to mass on their soil.¹ As the historical protectors two of Islam's holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, many Saudis viewed the American military presence a "desecration."² Within a cultural paradigm placing tremendous emphasis on protecting one's status, the need for outside assistance was a significant source of shame to the Saudi regime.³

These factors, exacerbated by economics and the continued presence of some 5,000 U.S. military personnel, has fueled new extremist fundamentalist movements in the Kingdom. "For fundamentalists, the U.S. is to Saudi Arabia what the Soviet Union was

to Afghanistan: an infidel occupation force propping up a regime that persecutes true Muslims.⁴ Even Saudi's moderate leadership experiences the "painful paradox" of needing the American presence while simultaneously resenting the intrusion with its attendant shame,⁵ while the Arab View web site is full of stories and comments about how the Gulf war "opened the way for non-Arab neighbors and international forces to fulfill their ambitions."⁶ The cost of the war, combined with low oil prices, has left the kingdom with huge debts, cutting Saudi per capita income in half, while budget realities have driven the regime to strip once generous social programs.⁷ The soaring population of unemployed, university-educated youth provides fertile ground for the message of Osama bin Laden, the exiled Saudi millionaire, whom the U.S. State Department calls "one of the most significant financial sponsors of Islamic extremist activities in the world today."⁸ His goals are two-fold: To drive the Americans from the Kingdom, and to topple the monarchy which supports them.⁹ The two bombings of U.S. military personnel in Saudi Arabia—the first such acts of terrorism in Saudi Arabia in the history of the Kingdom—are symptomatic of the destabilizing presence of U.S. forces. While denying responsibility, bin Laden claims that these acts were the natural expression of Saudi anger toward the Americans and the corrupt regime which enlisted their aid to fight other Muslims.¹⁰ The subsequent force protection measures added to the strain on our relationship with the deeply "embarrassed" Saudis:¹¹ Our evacuation of the wives and children of U.S. security assistance advisors in Saudi Arabia was a tremendous insult to a culture which places an inordinately high value on hospitality and protection of guests, further undermining the regime's credibility.¹² Though Warren Christopher insisted that the Saudi government remained "solid and stable,"¹³ a U.S.-led military rescue of the

Gulf would do little for the popularity of our troops and our long-term goal of Gulf stability. "On the contrary, direct U.S. intervention in the region will only incite the most militant Islamic movements to unite more vigorously under an anti-American banner."¹⁴

In the meantime, our continuous military presence—with its regular surges to meet the "threat *du jour*" from Iran or Iraq—is costing us dearly. Pentagon sources place our regular deployment costs in the region at \$45 to \$50 billion a year.¹⁵ By itself, the cost of Operation DESERT THUNDER, the February 1998 confrontation with Iraq, topped \$600 million, according to Deputy Defense Secretary John Hamre.¹⁶ Former Air Force Chief of Staff, General (retired) Michael Dugan points out that these deployments usually occur "at the expense of future programs," perhaps one day denying us the technological edge that made the Gulf War such a one-sided affair.¹⁷ There are other costs directly attributable to the desert deployments: lower morale, pilot retention problems, and insufficient training.¹⁸ While it is not the purpose of this paper to debate the wisdom of our presence in the Gulf, an additional buildup to counter Iranian aggression would only add to the burden, one which may already outweigh the benefits achieved.¹⁹ Economically, it is time to let others take the lead in regional security.

The logical choice is the GCC: The GCC states have both the imperative and the capability to either deter or counter an Iranian anti-access strategy. The former stems from several sources, not the least of which is their own economic dependence on the Gulf, both as a waterway and the location of resource reserves and desalinization plants. Thus, it is in their own vital interests to resist aggression in the Gulf.

Additionally, a lead role in the next Gulf confrontation would justify their own vast military expenditures over the last decade. Indeed, one source for unrest in Saudi

Arabia was the general question of the value of the billions spent on defense that was impotent in the face of the first real threat.²⁰ As the per capita income of Gulf states continues to decline, accompanied by cuts in social programs and subsidies, these questions will only become more pointed. Even members of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) express their disapproval of additional multimillion-dollar military acquisitions in light of the growing social problems within the country.²¹ With over \$90 billion more poured into Saudi's hi-tech arsenal since the war,²² the effective use of this expensive hardware against the Iranian threat could quiet some of this discontent.

Likewise, it will increase confidence within the militaries and promote greater independence. The Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) provide a negative example. During the Gulf War, RSAF AWACS flew in "goalie" positions far from the Iraqi border. Senior RSAF leaders today question having been relegated to this role in light of the cultural and political concerns raised above.²³ The trend continues today with USAF AWACS flying the "front line" while Saudi AWACS remain primarily in training areas in spite of the fact that the program is now over ten years old. Many Saudi aviators have come to accept this dependent role and now wonder why they should fly the front line when that is what they pay the U.S. forces to do.²⁴ These observations are not intended to denigrate the Saudis. The author has personally witnessed the RSAF rise to the occasion during numerous demanding exercises and real-world contingencies, such as the DESERT STRIKE missile attack on Iraq in 1996, demonstrating both competence and the ability to surge when required.²⁵ The Saudi F-15 pilot who downed the Iraqi *Mirages* during the Gulf War did so under difficult circumstances and became a tremendous source of military pride for the Kingdom.²⁶ Likewise, a prominent role in a

conflict with Iran could replace lethargy and dependence with confidence and independence, crucial to the evolution of GCC forces.

Given ample justification for the GCC to lead the fight against Iran, do they have the military means? Conditionally, this paper asserts that they do. With our own vital interests at stake, the U.S. does have a military role to play in countering Iranian forces, but it is a supporting role. This role can become even less prominent if future GCC military procurement and training is focused on their current deficiencies. Ultimately, the GCC can evolve into a force capable of countering with minimal assistance any Iranian attempt to cut off the Gulf.

Even from a purely numerical perspective, the GCC has more combat aircraft than Iran—495 to 440—where the Iranian number comes from *Jane's Sentinel*, the worst case estimate.²⁷ Qualitatively, the picture is even better. Over sixty percent of the GCC's combat aircraft are today's premier fourth generation multi-role fighters (F-15, F-16, F/A-18, *Tornado*, *Mirage 2000*); while Iran has less than 120 total MiG-29s and Su-24s, their most lethal aircraft.²⁸ The rest include some 180 pre-Revolution U.S. aircraft, less than half of which are believed to be operational;²⁹ Chinese versions of the obsolete MiG-19 and MiG-21; and a hodge-podge of other varieties, mostly transferred from Iraq during the Gulf War. While fiscal realities will continue to constrain Iranian air force modernization plans, the Saudis have begun taking delivery of 72 F-15S multi-role fighters beginning in 1998, giving them a significant offensive capability.³⁰ The air force balance of power is clearly tipped in the GCC's favor.

Even the vaunted Iranian navy seems not so formidable against the GCC's capabilities. Despite *Sentinel's* accounting, which attributes the largest Gulf navy to Iran,

others contend that it is not the most powerful, even with the attack submarines. Pending the delivery of three more upgraded *La Fayette*-class frigates—armed with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles, torpedoes, and anti-submarine helicopters—“Saudi Arabia will have the most powerful navy in the Gulf, with seven frigates, four US-supplied *Badr*-class corvettes, nine US-supplied *Siddiq*-class missile attack vessels and dozens of supply ships, torpedo boats and minesweepers.”³¹ Meanwhile, budget constraints are preventing Iran from replacing its pre-1972 major surface combatants, none of which are fully mission capable.³² Hence, the military balance of power alone should deter Tehran from a rash anti-access strategy.

Assuming it did not, however, the GCC should be prepared to counter the scenario outlined above using minimal visible U.S. involvement. Airpower will be a decisive factor in their success. As shown, the GCC is both qualitatively and quantitatively superior in this department. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia’s mature fleet of five AWACS and sophisticated Peace Shield integrated air defense network provides a superior means by which to control GCC aircraft. Iran has no equivalent network, and are years from effectively fielding the Russian A-50 *Mainstay* “AWACS” currently still on their defense “wish list.”³³ Air-to-air, Iran’s small force of MiG-29s and aging U.S. aircraft are no match for the GCC’s advanced fighter aircraft.³⁴ Properly integrated, GCC forces should be able to achieve the prerequisite for opening the Gulf—air superiority. Under this umbrella, other operations can commence. Airpower is likewise the key to neutralizing Iran’s sea- and land-based missiles. The combined navies, fielding primarily *Harpoon* (with a greater range than the C802) and *Exocet* missiles, are certainly a match for Iran’s navy,³⁵ but Iranian mines may place these limited high-cost assets at too great a

risk. From the air, however, the GCC can rain a variety of precision weapons (including laser guided bombs; AS-30, *Exocet*, *Maverick*, and *Sea Eagle* missiles; and even *Shrike* anti-radar missiles for suppression of Iranian air defenses) on Iranian surface vessels and shore-based sites, especially those on the critical island of Abu Musa.³⁶ Eisenstadt accurately assesses the tremendous disadvantage of the Iranian fleet due to its lack of air cover.³⁷ GCC air losses can be expected due to Iranian SAMs, but these should be limited by Iranian weakness in air defense as demonstrated during the Iran-Iraq war, where Iraq bombed Iranian targets virtually unimpeded.³⁸ Iran continues to rely on point defense of its high value targets. They have so far been unable or unwilling to field a comprehensive area defense due to both the huge size of Iran and cost-effectiveness assessments from the Gulf War, where Iraq's relatively sophisticated French-built air defense network proved vulnerable to coalition attack.³⁹ Against Iran's short range SAMs, use of stand-off weapons will limit GCC losses even more, as well as reduce the need to overfly Iranian territory. Thus, GCC air takes the lead in re-opening the Gulf.

The U.S., meanwhile, plays a vital yet low-profile role in this air campaign. USAF AWACS and RC-135 aircraft—already in the Kingdom—augment analogous RSAF assets to provide a 24-hour radar air and signals intelligence picture. Experienced in exercising with all of our GCC partners, USAF AWACS provide veteran airborne command and control to integrate the air battle. USAF advisors on board the RSAF assets and in the Peace Shield operations centers bridge the gap in experience of their Saudi counterparts. With CENTCOM experts in GCC planning cells, U.S. augmentation of GCC forces is complete—and virtually invisible, requiring no new deployments to the region with no new geopolitical ramifications.

Still relying only on assets already in the Middle East, the U.S. airpower *could* play a more active role in the operations by providing fighter aircraft to cover the high value air and naval assets, or even conducting strike missions. For example, it will be critical to neutralize the three Iranian SA-5 sites early in the conflict. This system comprises the only long-range SAM threat that would significantly inhibit our operations, and its importance as a planning factor may warrant *Tomahawk* strikes, launched from a safe distance before combat aircraft begin their Gulf operations. Though only discussing assets currently in the region, this paper recognizes that our decision-makers may feel compelled to deploy additional forces if for no other reason than to be prepared should the conflict expand. However, the purpose of this paper is to address the limited anti-access contingency through the primary use of GCC forces, thereby limiting the reliance on and cost to the U.S., as well as the political costs to the GCC. The omnipresent threat of a massive response by U.S. airpower will hopefully retard the expansion of this conflict; however, ideally GCC airpower will do the trick.

Essentially a naval problem, airpower alone cannot maintain free access to sea lines of communication. Unfortunately, a more active U.S. naval role will likely be required in two key areas to re-open the Gulf: anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and mine countermeasures (MCM). Though most GCC navies maintain some capability in both areas, both are highly technical fields requiring specialized equipment and expertise.⁴⁰ On the positive side, the covert nature of submarines will likely keep the ASW effort low-profile, while a Western presence to clear deadly minefields in international waters has a decidedly benign, defensive quality, and is therefore less likely to create an anti-Western uproar. Furthermore, U.S.-led MCM operations can proceed in conjunction

with, and escorted by, GCC naval forces and under a cover of GCC air power. Thus, the GCC still fulfills a major role in reopening the Gulf.

This role can increase with the proper acquisition of future equipment. The extensive use of airpower against point targets dictates the need for continued investment in high-accuracy, long-range air-to-surface missiles. Longer range, more accurate, and simpler (to maintain and operate) systems, such as the SLAM ER (Standoff Land-Attack Missile Expanded Response—essentially an updated *Harpoon*), would increase GCC effectiveness against Iranian missile sites and surface vessels. With a range in excess of 150 miles, the missile could be used to take out Iran's SA-5s without ever entering the SAM's lethal envelope.⁴¹ We must balance our reluctance to export such cutting-edge technology with the need to adequately equip the GCC to take on Iran with confidence.

Since MCM and ASW represent two of the biggest holes in the GCC's ability to defend the Gulf, Gulf states may need to refocus some of their resources in these areas. The U.S. is currently researching, testing, and fielding a number of promising systems such as the helicopter-mounted *Magic Lantern*, a laser system which has proven highly effective in detecting surface and shallow-moored mines.⁴² To counter bottom mines, the U.S. Navy is fielding the Mine Neutralization System, a remotely operated submersible.⁴³ Another near term approach to the problem is the Advanced Deployable System: a mini-SOSUS system of hydrophones laid covertly by submarines or aircraft which can detect diesel submarines in shallow waters and observe mine-laying activities.⁴⁴ As for the direct threat of the *Kilo* itself, our *Captor* mine may represent the most effective solution to the GCC's ASW deficiencies in the short term: "Planted near harbor mouths or submarine transit routes, the unattended device automatically fires its capsulized torpedo

when an enemy submarine is detected and classified by its acoustic characteristics and passes within torpedo acquisition range.⁴⁵ In short, the Navy's "Forward...From the Sea" policy is driving the advancement of technology to address the challenges of detecting and neutralizing enemy submarines and mines along the world's coasts. Recent successes in technology transfer to Saudi Arabia prove that this obstacle is not insurmountable.⁴⁶ If the technology can be shared, then GCC states may even be able to share in the financial burden of its development. Navy Assistant Secretary for Research, Development, and Acquisition, John Douglass, claims that a lack of resources is the primary challenge in meeting the new littoral threat;⁴⁷ meanwhile, the *Navy Times* reports that our mine warfare programs are underfunded.⁴⁸ The Navy believes that innovation is the way to overcome the shortfall, including innovative management. Sharing the research and development costs with the GCC—equally dependent on the Gulf waterway for their own prosperity—represents one such management innovation.⁴⁹ On the other hand, if the technology is too sensitive or perhaps too sophisticated for assimilation by GCC forces, at least it represents a legitimate use of U.S. military power in the Gulf serving both the interests of regional states and the rest of the world—the restoration of free transit through key international sea lines of communication.

Technology is not the only factor limiting the GCC's ability to defend the Gulf. GCC militaries face many of the same training, personnel, and assimilation issues as their counterpart across the Gulf—in some ways more so, since their less constrained budgets have allowed them to buy more technologically sophisticated Western systems at a very high rate. In a speech that must have chagrined U.S. defense contractors while at the same time disarming our Iranian critics, Secretary Perry accurately noted that what the

GCC needed now was "not more expensive weapons but rather improved training and integration of these weapons into their force structure."⁵⁰ He also recognized another serious barrier hindering the GCC from effectively confronting the Iranian threat: their reluctance to act collectively, especially when it comes time to pay for collective defense.⁵¹ However, strides are being made, such as the recent linkage of Saudi, Kuwaiti and Bahraini air defense systems.⁵² By standing together on defense of the Gulf, the GCC can take the lead in keeping it open.

Notes

¹ Gordon and Trainer, 38-53.

² Scott Macleod, "The Paladin of Jihad," *Time*, 6 May 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 21 January 1997, available from <http://www.epnet.com/bin/epwgargoyle/submit=full/session=214826/st=2/qn=1/full>; and Howard Chua-Eoan, "Rebels in the Kingdom," *Time*, 23 Dec 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 21 January 1997, available from <http://www.epnet.com/bin/epwgargoyle/submit=text/session=214826/st=3/qn=14/ftext>.

³ USAF Special Operations School, *Middle East Orientation Course (MEOC) Handbook*, (1994): L-3 - L-20, M-4, M-8.

⁴ Chua-Eoan.

⁵ Christopher Dickey, "Target America," *Newsweek*, no. 28 (8 July 1996): 24.

⁶ Turki Abdullah Al-Sudairi, "Quo vadis Arabia?" *Al Riyadh Daily*, 18 September 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 17 October 1997, available from www.arab.net/arabview/articles/taher12.htm

⁷ Bruce W. Nelan, "Gulf Shock Waves," *Time*, 8 July 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 21 January 1997, available from <http://www.epnet.com/bin/epwgargoyle/submit=text/session=214826/st=2/qn=13/ftext>; and Christopher Dickey and Gregory Vistica, "Attack on the House of Saud," *Newsweek*, 27 November 1995, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 21 January 1997, available from <http://www.epnet.com/bin/epwgargoyle/submit=text/session=214826/st=1/qn=12/ftext>.

⁸ Macleod.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Robert Fisk, "Saudis Know: The Real Foe Is America," *The Independent*, 10 July 1996, reprinted in *World Press Review*, October 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 21 January 1997, available from <http://www.epnet.com/bin/epwgargoyle/submit=text/session=214826/st=3/qn=11/ftext>.

¹¹ Dickey and Vistica.

¹² USAF Special Operations School, *MEOC Handbook*, M-6 – M-7.

¹³ Nelan.

Notes

¹⁴ Hooshang Amirahmadi, "Persian Gulf Stability Hinges on US-Iran Dialogue," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, no. 14 (April 1996): 90; Chua-Eoan agrees.

¹⁵ Amirahmadi, 75; and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Crossfire: U.S. Asserts Superpower Leadership in Battle with Iraq," transcript, 7 November 1997, Cable News Network, Inc., 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 10 November 1997, available from <http://cnn.com/transcripts/9711/07/cf.00.html>.

¹⁶ Gannett News Service, "Desert Thunder's price tag tops \$600 million," *Montgomery Advertiser*, Thursday, (26 February 1998): 5A.

¹⁷ General Michael Dugan, former Chief of Staff of the Air Force, "Setting the Example," lecture, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, 5 November 1997.

¹⁸ Richard J. Newman, "Christmas in a Desert Camp and Asking Why," *U.S. News & World Report*, 29 December 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 21 January 1997, available from <http://www.epnet.com/bin/epwgargoyle/submit=text/session=214826/st=1/qn=15/ftext>.

¹⁹ Carpenter.

²⁰ Nelan.

²¹ Anonymous members of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) in discussions with the author.

²² "Gulf States/Regional Overview," *Jane's Sentinel*.

²³ Anonymous members of the RSAF Air Staff in meetings with the author.

²⁴ Anonymous members of the RSAF in discussions with the author.

²⁵ Author's personal experience as an advisor and instructor to the Royal Saudi Air Force and chief of an extended training service specialists team in Saudi Arabia. RSAF instructors preferred to let their American counterparts assume the burden of instructional duties as long as we were available. However, when the advisory team was downsized in 1996, RSAF instructors—by necessity—began to pick up a larger share of the work rather than allow the program to fail.

²⁶ Gordon and Trainor, 265-266.

²⁷ "Gulf States/Regional Overview," *Jane's Sentinel*. Estimates are approximately the same in Periscope's USNI Military Database. Other sources credit Iran with less than half of the total combat aircraft of the GCC (Ehteshami, 33).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 320.

³⁰ "Saudi Arabia/Air Force Summary," *Jane's Sentinel*; and *The Military Balance* 1996/97 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), 126.

³¹ Ehteshami, 37.

³² Eisenstadt, 131.

³³ Ibid., 126-128.

³⁴ Ehteshami, 36.

³⁵ "Navy Summary" for each GCC state, *Jane's Sentinel*; *The Military Balance* 1996/97, 126-149; E.R. Hooton, *Jane's Naval Weapon Systems*, (Coulson, UK: Jane's Information Group Ltd., 1997), 22, 26.

Notes

³⁶ "Air Force Summary" for each GCC state, *Jane's Sentinel; The Military Balance 1996/97*, 126-149; Duncan Lennox, *Jane's Air-Launched Weapons*, (Coulson, UK: Jane's Information Group Ltd., 1997), 21, 22, 23, 26.

³⁷ Eisenstadt, 134.

³⁸ Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 321; Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran and Iraq: The threat from the Northern Gulf*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 138.

³⁹ Ibid., and Eisenstadt, 126-128.

⁴⁰ Miller, 43; and "Navy Summary" for each GCC state, *Jane's Sentinel*.

⁴¹ James W. Canan, "Expanded E&MD Success for SLAM ER Program," *Sea Power*, no. 40 (May 1997): 35-36. The article claims that the missile is both easier to maintain and to target; however, it should be noted that actual operators have stated that the system is actually difficult to employ.

⁴² Mary I. Nolan, "A Quantum Leap in Navy AMCM Capabilities," *Sea Power*, no. 40 (March 1997): 15.

⁴³ Vincent Kiernan, "Shore Wars," *New Scientist*, no. 145 (20 August 1994): 28.

⁴⁴ Stan Zimmerman, "The 'Navy After Next' Looms Out of the Fog of Peace," *Sea Power*, no. 40 (January 1997): 65.

⁴⁵ Naval Advisory Group, Air University, *AU-16 Employment of Navy and Marine Forces*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1994), 52.

⁴⁶ The Peace Sentinel VI program set a new standard for the release of technology to Saudi Arabia: Program managers were able to work the release of nearly every system on the USAF RC-135, including cutting-edge systems not even fielded yet on the current version of the USAF aircraft.

⁴⁷ Zimmerman, 59.

⁴⁸ "Funds for Mines Don't Go Deep," *Navy Times*, 9 October 1995, 32; on-line, Internet, 21 January 1997, available from <http://www.epnet.com/bin/epwgargyle/submit=text/session=214826/st=1/qn=9/ftext>.

⁴⁹ Again the RSAF Peace Sentinel VI program provides the example: Their requirements for cutting edge technology in their version of the USAF RC-135 was allowing the prime contractor to conduct research and development that would ultimately benefit both USAF and RSAF platforms, R&D that would not have occurred in the absence of the RSAF's interest and resources toward the program.

⁵⁰ Perry, 1.

⁵¹ Ibid., 2.

⁵² "Saudi Arabia/Air Force Summary," *Jane's Sentinel*.

Chapter 5

Bridging the Gulf

It is self-evident that the U.S. must sooner or later reestablish ties with Iran.

—Ambassador David Passage
*Presentation to ACSC, 13 January 1998*¹

With or without an effective Peninsula Shield force, the Gulf by its very geography will always represent a strategic vulnerability as long as it remains a major artery for the world's oil. Even an outgunned Iran has what it takes today to restrict the Gulf if only for a limited time, and they continue to acquire more and better training and equipment toward this end. We must develop a regional strategy that reduces the threat to the flow of Gulf commerce in the long run.

Our current policy toward Iran may have just the opposite effect. Numerous regional experts, such as former National Security Council Iranian affairs staffer Gary Sick, believe that our policy of containment towards Iran has no definable end state and provides no credible road map for changing those elements of Iranian behavior that are unacceptable.² If proponents of the containment policy claim responsibility for positive changes in Iran's behavior mentioned above, then they are indeed missing the next step: recognition of Iran's progress. Rather, our blanket condemnation may actually "reverse favorable trends for domestic liberalization and normal foreign relations that are growing in the universities, the press, the business community, the professional community, and

pragmatic circles in the government.”³ Instead, we bolster the regime’s hard-liners—the very elements within Iran that favor terrorism and argue that nuclear weapons are the only way to guarantee their security—by giving them an external enemy on which to blame their problems.⁴ Ironically, we recognized and avoided this potentiality *vis-à-vis* China: “‘Containment,’ said Winston Lord, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, ‘would imply that we treat China as an enemy,’ which would be ‘a self-fulfilling prophecy.’”⁵ Likewise, by ignoring Iran’s pragmatists and attempting to cut off the state, we further alienate the country, undermining their stability and making their behavior more unpredictable.⁶ An isolated Iran, pushed to the brink of collapse, is more likely to lash out and threaten Gulf security.

Another potential side effect is the damage to our credibility as the proponents of an irrational foreign policy. Sick asserts that Israel alone considered our total embargo strategy to be a good idea: “Japan formally rejected the embargo, and American allies in Europe privately greeted it with derision...Staunch allies such as Turkey, Morocco, Oman and Jordan all negotiated or signed economic agreements with Iran after the announcement of the embargo.”⁷ Even Kuwait has distanced itself from our “dual containment” policy, and the U.A.E. remains Iran’s largest non-oil trading partner.⁸ Our efforts to persuade other countries to isolate Iran reveal embarrassing contradictions in our foreign policy. For example, pressuring Japan to delay investment in Iran’s Karun River hydroelectric project only makes the nuclear alternative more attractive to a state with growing domestic power demands.⁹ And the nuclear reactors we oppose for Iran “are no different from those we are offering to North Korea in order to gain their compliance with the non-proliferation regime.”¹⁰ Such indiscriminate policies taint

foreign perception of U.S. reliability, potentially eroding our relationships with other nations of the world. Former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney asserts that our Iran policy undermines the full range of our legitimate concerns from maintaining the coalition against Iraq to the Middle East peace process.¹¹ South Africa's internationally respected leader Nelson Mandela lent credibility to Cheney's claim when he summed up the world's growing frustration with our superpower dominance this way:

How can they, the Americans, have the arrogance to dictate to us where we should go or which countries should be our friends? They have no morals. We cannot accept that a state assumes the role of world's policeman.¹²

In our attempts to isolate Iran, we may be isolating ourselves.

Realistically, Iran cannot be isolated. It is by far the region's most populous country, and is strategically located between Europe and Asia with extensive coastline along both the Arabian and Omani Gulfs. It contains ten percent of the world's oil reserves, as well as the second largest known reserves of natural gas. The birthplace of modern political Islam, Iran is the inspiration for Islamic movements in other countries.¹³

In December 1997, Iran hosted officials from more than 50 countries at an Islamic summit emphasizing religion as a unifying force. The conference was a major success for Iran, drawing 28 heads of state—including Saudi's Crown Prince and Kuwait's Emir—to Iran's largest diplomatic gathering since the revolution.¹⁴ In contrast, the U.S.-backed economic summit the previous month in Qatar "fizzled when most Arab countries stayed away to protest Israel's presence."¹⁵ Notably, the representatives at the Islamic conference unanimously condemned religious-inspired terrorism, lending credence to Middle East experts' claims that Iran's behavior is moderating and that political Islam "cannot be overturned; it can only be accommodated and, hopefully, tamed."¹⁶ Europe,

Japan, China, Russia, and even the Gulf states have “calculated that they must accept the Islamic Republic as a fact;” this paper holds that it is time for the U.S. to do the same.¹⁷

The author supports the widely espoused policy of selective engagement of Iran. Research clearly indicates that our current policy “is unpopular among the vast majority of policy experts in Washington, who believe that a policy of engagement is the most plausible course for changing Iran’s disruptive behavior.”¹⁸ International relations Professor Alon Ben-Meir suggests we seek out those Iranians disposed to dialogue with Americans, and encourage contact between businesses and educational institutions.¹⁹ This advice sounds encouragingly similar to Iranian President Khatami’s own overture for informal dialogue with American “professors, writers, scholars, artists, journalists, and tourists.”²⁰ Similar guarded “offers” of reconciliation were made during the Rafsanjani presidency: Professor Amirahmedi, Director of Rutgers’ Middle Eastern studies program, claims that top Iranian officials told him that Iran’s offer to Conoco and the attempt at joining the Azerbaijan pipeline consortium—both rebuffed by the U.S. government—were attempts “to provide Iran with a forum of mutual interest with the United States upon which further reconciliation could be built.”²¹ Former Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletrau, feeling “frustrated and a bit humiliated” that CNN was so far conducting the dialogue instead of representatives of the U.S. government, urged us not to pass up the new opportunity that Khatami’s statements represent.²²

This dialogue can ultimately provide the basis for normalizing diplomatic relations. Sick and Ben-Meir agree in their approach: We need to cool the rhetoric, that is, stop the blanket condemnations of Iran so that we can focus on the issues that are most important, such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the Middle East peace

process, and, if necessary, the threat to Gulf transit.²³ Such a policy could reap important strategic benefits for the U.S.: Positive economic leverage over Iran, as opposed to the unilateral sanctions historically doomed to failure;²⁴ the renewed support of our allies and legitimacy in the eyes of the world;²⁵ and the type of inside information and intelligence on Iran that only comes from government and business personnel within the country.²⁶

The ultimate reward would be a stabilized Iran, fully integrated into the regional and global community. Regionally, Iran cannot and will not be ignored. Former President Rafsanjani made that clear:

We believe the littoral states in the Persian Gulf are the true owners of this area, and they have the responsibility to maintain security and peace there. Half of the coastline belongs to Iran, so Iran alone has the same amount of rights and responsibilities as all those countries put together.²⁷

The key to long-term stability is regional dialogue involving all Gulf states, confidence building measures to add transparency to military developments,²⁸ and ultimately a role for Iran in the collective defense of the region. Says Amirahmedi, "A strong, economically vibrant, and reliable Iran, effectively integrated into the community of nations, would exert a tremendous stabilizing influence on Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern Turkey, Iraq, and, most important, the Persian Gulf."²⁹

Critics may scoff this strategy as dangerously idealistic; the proponents of dual containment argue that a strong Iran will only be more prone to mischief. While providing ample evidence of modern Iran's pragmatic incentives not to again alienate the rest of the world, this paper does assume a certain degree of rational behavior on the part of Iran. No 'expert' can predict the future or discount the possibility of a resurgence of Iranian hardliners. However, analysis suggests other benefits of integrating Iran into Gulf security arrangements that even the cynic can appreciate. Tehran is already indirectly

accessing Western technology through Pakistan, Turkey, Israel, South Korea, Taiwan, and China.³⁰ Incorporating them into regional security structures will likely open their markets to direct military sales. A security assistance arrangement with Iran will provide us with intimate knowledge of their capabilities (as it does in GCC states like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait), and may even offer more sinister benefits predicted by futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler: the opportunity to provide Iran military hardware embedded with components or code that limit or prevent their use under prespecified circumstances.³¹ Meanwhile, containment risks serious military consequences: The U.S. has essentially pushed Iran into the arms of states that are only too willing to supply them with weapons to satisfy both their legitimate defense needs and destabilizing aggressive tendencies. Another by-product is Iran's robust indigenous arms industry.³² Dual containment may even encourage an Iran-Iraq rapprochement, by giving countries with otherwise little shared interest a common enemy.³³ Our lack of economic and diplomatic ties with Iran means we would have to monitor these developments from the outside and have no opportunity to positively influence them. Containment attempts to marginalize the Gulf's greatest potential power; engagement realistically recognizes this as an impossibility and seeks instead to use Iran as a force for regional stability—the only means to ensure the free flow of resources through the Gulf in the long run.

Notes

¹ Permission to attribute received by telcon with Ambassador Passage, 10 March 1998.

² Sick, 22. See also Colin MacKinnon, "Iran Sanctions: Dual Containment Gets Teeth," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, no. 14 (April 1996): 91.

³ Mattair, 29.

⁴ MacKinnon, 97; Sick, 21-22; Hart, 25; Mattair, 29; Vaziri, 79; Al-Suwaidi, 287; and others.

⁵ Quoted in Sick, 22.

Notes

⁶ Vaziri, 79.

⁷ Sick, 21.

⁸ Vaziri, 77-78.

⁹ Mattair, 26.

¹⁰ Sick, 21.

¹¹ Dick Cheney, "Oil Trade," address to the U.S.-Russia Business Council, Washington D.C., 19 November 1997, televised on C-Span, 19 November 1997.

¹² Nelson Mandela, quoted in "Crossfire: U.S. Asserts Superpower Leadership in Battle with Iraq," transcript, 7 November 1997, Cable News Network, Inc., 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 10 November 1997, available from <http://cnn.com/transcripts/9711/07/cf.00.html>.

¹³ Amirahmedi, 75 and 90.

¹⁴ Associated Press, "Muslim Leaders Condemn Terrorism," *Montgomery Advertiser*, (Friday, 12 December 1997): 11A.

¹⁵ Associated Press, "US Gets Little Help in Stance on Iran," *Montgomery Advertiser*, (Sunday, 7 December 1997): 5A.

¹⁶ Amirahmedi, 90.

¹⁷ Vaziri, 79.

¹⁸ Amirahmedi, 96.

¹⁹ Alon Ben-Meir, "Is It Time to Rethink U.S. Policy on Iran?" *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, no. 14 (April 1996): 92.

²⁰ Khatami.

²¹ Amirahmedi, 96.

²² Robert Pelletrau, "Crossfire: Should U.S. Open Arms to Iran? Reaction to Khatami's Interview," transcript, 7 January 1998, Cable News Network, Inc., 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 10 January 1998, available from <http://cnn.com/transcripts/9801/07/cf.00.html>.

²³ Sick, 22; Ben-Meir, 92.

²⁴ Sick, 22; Kazuo Takahashi, "When an Enemy of Your Friend is a Friend," *Middle East Insight*, no. 11 (Jul-Aug 95): 36. Hughes discusses the historical ineffectiveness of trade restrictions since WWI: They were successful in only about one third of 115 cases (Hughes, 100).

²⁵ Sick, 22; Rathmell, "Iran's Liquid Lifeline," 414.

²⁶ Abram N. Shulsky discusses in depth the importance of human intelligence, including that collected by diplomatic, business, and tourist sources, in *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, revised by Gary Schmitt, (NY: Brassey's, 1993), 39-40, 42-43. Papp, 143-144, 507; and Hughes, 94-95 also document the importance of diplomatic and other contact for information gathering.

²⁷ Rafsanjani, 13.

²⁸ Lawrence G. Potter, "The Need for Confidence-Building Measures in the Persian Gulf," *Middle East Insight*, no. 12 (January-February 1996): 27-30.

²⁹ Amirahmedi, 86; Takahashi, 36.

³⁰ IDR article, 34.

Notes

³¹ Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 233.

³² Rathmell, "Iran's Rearmament," 319.

³³ Vaziri, 79.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Recent history reveals an active U.S. involvement in the security of the Arabian Gulf region. With two thirds of the world's known oil reserves, plus other significant natural resources, our interest in unimpeded access to these resources through the Gulf is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. It is natural that we be concerned with Iran's growing ability to deny us that access.

However, despite confusing messages emanating from Tehran, a rational analysis of their intentions clearly reveals that any attempt to close the Gulf would be diametrically opposed to their highest foreign policy priority: normalization of international relations. The likely international response to stopping the free flow of commerce through the Gulf—not to mention the direct effects on their own economy—clearly make it a strategy of last resort in response to a threat to their own vital national interests. Furthermore, their emphasis on sea-denial capabilities can be construed as prudent defensive measures for a state with limited resources with which to address a dangerous strategic environment.

Should they feel compelled to constrict the Gulf, our response must likewise consider the strategic environment. The U.S. cannot continue to fill the role of primary

Gulf security keeper: It costs too much and may foster the very regional instability we seek to reduce. In the long run, such a role threatens to alienate the rest of the world.

Fortunately, our security assistance relationships with the GCC are beginning to bear fruit. While the GCC states may not be ready to deal with Iran's large and experienced military in an all-out war, collectively they do have much of the capability, as well as the imperative, to take the lead in reopening the Gulf. We can play a crucial, yet less visible or politically sensitive, supporting role in areas such as planning and command and control. At this point, we will also have to take the lead in antisubmarine and mine warfare. However, focused acquisition in these weak areas, as well as realistic training and a collective spirit, can reduce GCC reliance on the U.S. in the future.

Still, the sheer fact of geography will indefinitely allow a belligerent Iran to pose a threat to Gulf access, and their capabilities are only increasing. Only an end to the hostile relationship will significantly reduce this threat, and experts agree that the time has come to abandon our shortsighted containment policy in favor of cautious engagement of Iran. Gulf stability depends on Iranian stability which is in turn dependent on a strong, economically viable Iran, fully integrated into the regional and global community.

The choice is ours. We can continue to cultivate an animosity that can only lead to more regional trauma, or we can open the door to a new relationship with Iran. Only the latter provides hope in the long term for a free and secure Gulf.

Appendix A

Regional Map



Figure 1. Map of Arabian (Persian) Gulf¹

Notes

¹ "Persian Gulf," City Net, Santa Barbara, CA: Magellan Geographix, 1992, on-line, Internet, 25 February 1998, available from <http://www.city.net/countries/qatar/maps/psgulf.html>.

Appendix B

Iranian Anti-Access Scenario

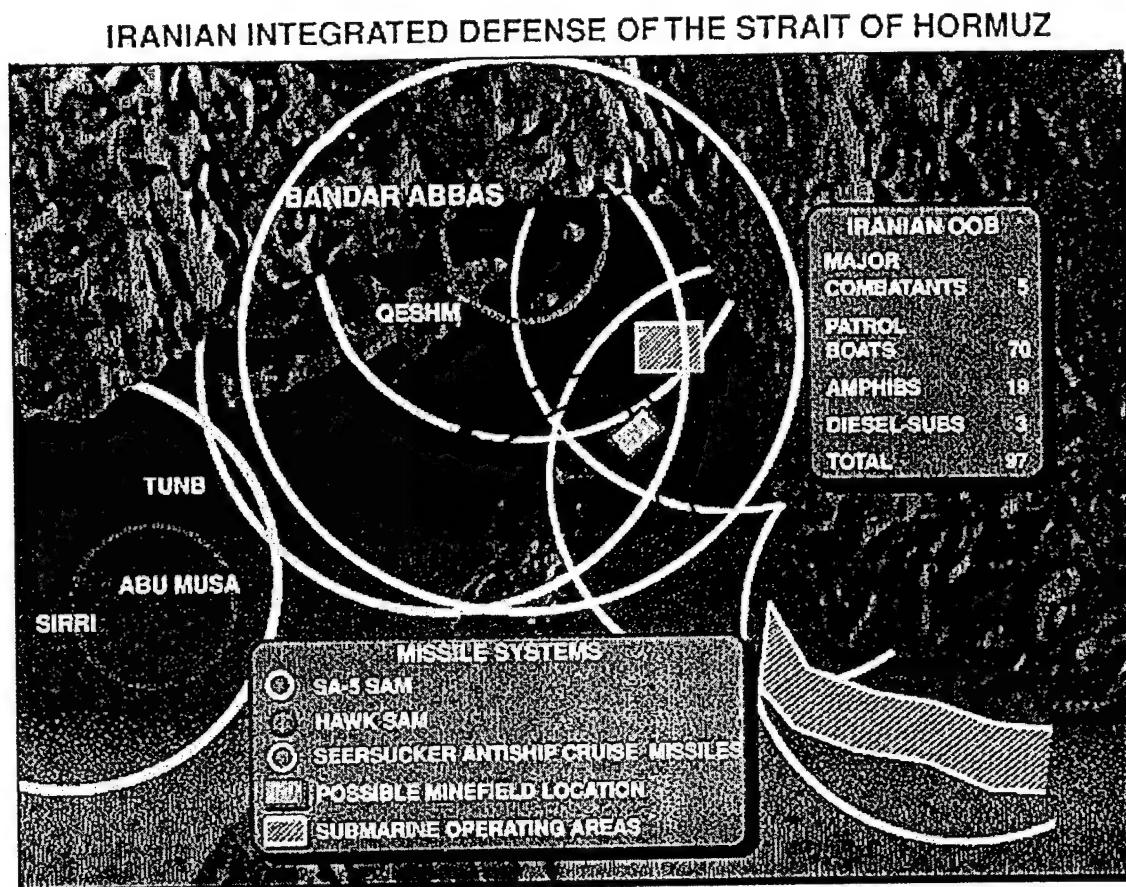


Figure 2. Surface and Subsurface Components of Iranian Anti-Access Strategy¹

Notes

¹ Office of Naval Intelligence, *Worldwide Submarine Challenges* (February 1997), 30.

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